

RUSSIAN FEDERATION FEDERAL ASSEMBLY
Deputy of the State Duma
2002-2003

September 15, 2002

To: Governor R. Abramovich of Chukotsky Autonomous Region
Governor M. Mashkovtsev of Kamchatsky Region
Governor V. Loginov of Koryak Autonomous Region
Governor T. Knowles of Alaska

Honorable Governors:

The regions you govern are washed by the waters of the Bering Sea. This sea is located where the Pacific and Arctic oceans meet and so serves as a natural link between two of the Earth's major continents – Eurasia and America.

I sincerely believe that the geographic location of the Bering Sea and our age-old traditions call for establishing close and constructive cooperation between its coastal regions. Let me outline just a few problems whose solution is impossible without collective effort.

The Bering Sea – one of the most productive arctic seas of the world – is a complex and integrated environmental entity. Russia and the United States have jurisdiction over its continental shelf and over 92% of its area. Back in 1994 the governments of the two countries signed a convention on conservation and management of pollack resources in the central areas of the Bering Sea, which was initialed by four other countries. An agreement on mutual fishery relations was signed in 1998.

Unfortunately all those measures have failed to persuade third countries to stop their harvest in Central Bering Sea, which damages the interests of both Russia and the United States. An alarming situation exists today not only with regard to the preservation of fishery resources (in particular, salmon, crab, etc.), but of other species as well, such as baleen whales, pacific walrus, migratory birds and birds nesting in colonies.

It must be noted that until now initiatives of both our countries to protect biodiversity and sustainability of resources of the Bering Sea have not achieved the desired result. I believe one of the main reasons for that is the lack of stakeholder region involvement in the initiatives. At the same time, as demonstrated by the experience of the Beringia

International Park in the northern part of the sea, the involvement of Alaska and Chukotka governments in its work has considerably enhanced its efficiency.

The same is true to an even greater extent of the development of coastal trade, tourism, and transportation (including the safety of sea travel). As you know, Honorable Governors, the peoples of our regions have a great mutual interest and are prepared to expand and develop their economic and cultural cooperation. Creating optimal conditions for that cooperation is our common purpose. Despite their tremendous potential tourist ties between our regions are still in their infancy, even thought those ties could become a catalyst for the region's economic growth and for cooperation between its peoples.

Of special significance is the issue of preserving the cultural heritage of our unique region. During the periods when the sea retreated, waves of human civilizations crossed over the Bering Bridge from one continent to the other, leaving their “historic traces” in our lands. Time, ocean and human activity have been destroying those traces and we must hurry to study and preserve them for future generations. Experience has shown that joint research here is most efficient and produces the best results.

International coordination of efforts is also necessary to preserve the unique culture of the natives people currently living on the shore of the Bering Sea, such as Aleut, Itelmen, Kamchadal, Koryak, Kerek, Chukchi, Inuit and Indian people. Not enough has been done in this area so far.

I believe that a comprehensive solution to the above-mentioned problems is possible only through a concerted effort of regional governments of Alaska, Kamchatka, Koryakia and Chukotka. I believe this to be a vital necessity of the 21st Century and an adequate response to globalization.

An international organization of this kind has been working in the European Arctic region for nearly ten years. That is the Barents Euro-arctic Region, which has given an impetus to the development of Russian and North European frontier territories. Regional cooperation has been established around the Baltic and the Black Seas as well. I believe a similar organization needs to be created in the Bering Sea region.

I envision such organization as a voluntary association based on intergovernmental agreements and protocols signed by the leaders of our regions. Other regions that have interests in the Bering Sea as well as native self-government organizations can be invited as observers. Regional cooperation must be supplemented by contacts between corresponding federal agencies of legislative and executive power. Naturally, the organizational principles and functions of the “Bering Region” organization will need to be additionally defined. If you agree in principle we could form a working group of specialists to develop a package of documents, as well as coordinate with the federal authorities and resolve other issues.

Honorable Governors, I believe that creating the “Bering Region” would not only serve the interests of our constituencies, but would become a serious practical step to support the Russian-American rapprochement started by the Presidents of Russia and of the United States, V. V. Putin and G. W. Bush.

With respect and hope for mutual understanding and future cooperation,

[Russian original signed]

V.M. Etylin
Deputy of the State Duma

TONY KNOWLES
Governor



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STATE OF ALASKA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
JUNEAU

October 2, 2002

The Honorable Vladimir M. Etylin
Deputy of the State Duma
Russian Federation Federal Assembly
Moscow
RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Via fax: (011-7) 095-415-5319 / 095-292-6955

Dear Mr. Etylin:

Thank you for your thought-provoking letter of September 15, which offers some bold ideas for addressing regional concerns between Alaska and our closest neighbors in the Russian Far East. Thank you also for attending the West Coast-Russian Far East Working Group meeting in Anchorage recently.

You have put forth an intriguing suggestion for a future course of action to focus on regional issues on both sides of the Bering Strait and Bering Sea. Your ideas were echoed in comments made at the Governors' Leadership Summit, which I hosted in my Anchorage office September 17, by Koryak Governor Loginov and the representative of the Kamchatka Governor, Alexander Potievsky. That discussion, along with the other Russian Far East working group events held in Anchorage, and certainly your long-time association with Alaska and regional issues underscores the importance of regional cooperation.

Although we do have mechanisms designed to bring our regions together—the Arctic Council, the Northern Forum, the West Coast-Russian Far East Working Group and, of course, our own bilateral efforts—your proposal would create a new vehicle for reaching our more immediate regional objectives. While these groups often deal with a variety of broader issues, some of the concerns that are closer to home may not receive the attention they deserve. Some of the issues you mention, such as Bering Sea fishing, are under the jurisdiction of the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council in Anchorage and international bodies. But as you point out, there is currently no entity that considers the common challenges we face as neighboring regions. In that sense, you make a good case for the value of a Beringia or Bering Council modeled after the Barents Euro-Arctic Council. One glance at a map seems to clearly define the boundaries of a geo-political area of shared interests encompassing Alaska and the Russian Far East provinces of Chukotka, Koryak, and Kamchatka. While Alaska has had good relations and shared interests with Sakhalin, Khabarovsk, Magadan and other areas of the Russian Far East—and wants to maintain these broader relations—you have clearly defined the additional benefits of a closer regional compact as well.

I appreciate your efforts to elicit the opinions and support of the governors of all four regions. Federal agencies, Native peoples indigenous to the region, companies with cross-border business (or the potential for it), and other constituencies should also have a role to play in creating a Bering Council to meet our common challenges, as you suggest.

The Honorable Vladimir M. Etylin

October 2, 2002

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Your idea and my response come as I near the end of my second term as governor. Although your proposal focuses on what I see as improving our common neighborhood of concerns, it is also a highly ambitious proposal. Thus, while recognizing the value inherent in creating a Bering Council to foster improved communications, problem-solving, and a new approach to regional solutions, I must defer any commitment to the next governor's administration. I say this not to avoid the challenge you offer us as a part of the Bering region, but rather because this is potentially too great and long-range an initiative to embark on in the closing days of my Administration.

While I cannot promise you what approach the next administration will pursue when it takes office in December, I think I can safely say that our outreach to the Russian Far East will continue in the same spirit of good neighborly relations and mutually beneficial cross-border activities. Alaska's Russian Far East policy has remained essentially unchanged for 16 years—ever since Governor Steve Cowper (1986-1990) helped melt the "Ice Curtain," as well as the term of Governor Walter Hickel (1990-1994) who maintains an enduring interest in Alaska-Russian Far East relations, and certainly during my eight years in office. I have worked to enhance the benefits of our relations with the Russian Far East, as has Lieutenant Governor Fran Ulmer, the Alaska Department of Community and Economic Development, the Alaska Division of International Trade and Market Development, the Alaska Legislature and public and private entities throughout Alaska.

I know that you are well aware of the role my Administration played in renewing Alaska-Chukotka relations and the opportunity for an array of cooperative activities between Alaska and Chukotka. You are aware because you played an instrumental role in this. And, of course, so did Chukotka Governor Abramovich. As for the other provinces which you envision as part of the Bering Region Council, my Administration has signed the first cooperation agreements with both Kamchatka and Koryak. In hosting the recent Russian Far East working group meeting, Alaska—the State of Alaska and many Alaskans from Nome to Sitka, from Barrow to the Aleutian Islands, from Anchorage to Fairbanks—demonstrated a commitment to working with the Russian Far East to bring benefits to our peoples, our business, and our regions on both sides of the border.

I encourage you in your efforts to seek cooperation from among the regional leaders and their constituents in our common Bering Region.

Sincerely,



Tony Knowles
Governor

cc: Chukotka Governor Roman Abramovich
Koryak Governor Vladimir Loginov
Kamchatka Governor Mikhail Mashkovtsev

TONY KNOWLES
Governor



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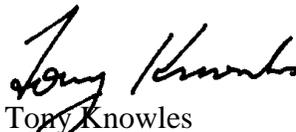
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